Qb 6243
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Of *FASTING.*

A

SERMON

Preached before the

QUEEN

AT

WHITE-HALL,

On *MAY* 23. MDCXCIV.

Being a Day of

Publick Humiliation.

By *RICHARD*, Lord Bishop of *Bath* and *Wells*.

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THE

Bishop of *BATH* and *WELLS*'s

FAST-SERMON

Before the

QUEEN

At *WHITE-HALL*,

On the 23d of *May*, 1694.

Zechariah VII. 5.

Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the prieſts, ſaying, When ye faſted and mourned in the fifth and ſeventh month, even thoſe ſeventy years, did ye at all faſt unto me, even unto me?

THeſe Words are an anſwer to the queſtion in the 3d. Verſe, *Should I weep in the fifth month, ſeparating my ſelf, as I have done theſe ſo many years?* To this the Prophet is commanded to reply in the Words of my Text; *When ye faſted*, &c.

I ſhall premiſe ſomething concerning the Faſts which obtained among the *Jews*, for the better underſtanding the Words of my Text.

Among the *Jews* there was but one Faſt in a year Commanded in the Law of *Moſes*; And that was the Day of Expiation, on the tenth Day of the ſeventh Month: Then they were obliged *to afflict their Souls, and to do no work*, under the ſevereſt penalty. So that it was at once to be obſerved as a *Sabbath*, and a *Faſt*; a day of *Abſtinence*, and of *Reſt*. And hence 'tis called

Levit. 16. 29. ch. 23. 29, 30. Numb. 29. 7.

Levit 16. 31. & ch. 23. 32. v. Thorndike *of Religious Aſſembl p.* 10.

not onely a *Faſt*, but a *Sabbath* of Reſt. A very ſolemn time, and which the *Jews* obſerved as ſuch. But what-ever their outward Expreſſions of Devotion were, they were Hypocrites in the mean time. And their Hypocriſie is laid open by *Iſaiah*, chap. 58. That Chapter I underſtand of this Faſt, even thoſe words, *v.* 13. *If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleaſure on my Holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the Holy of the Lord*, &c. By *Sabbath* here, we have no cauſe to underſtand the *Jews* weekly Sabbath; for the Prophet in the foregoing Words ſpeaks of their Faſting; and the Day of Expiation was then the onely ſtated Faſt, and is called from its firſt Inſtitution a *Sabbath*, as hath been obſerved before: *Kimchi* confeſſeth alſo that the *Rabbins* underſtood this place of the Day of Expiation; and *Abravenel* cites the *Vajikra Rabbah*, expreſsly interpreting the *Holy of the Lord* of the ſame day.

Selden *de jure Naturali, l.* III. *c.* 15.

Kimchi & Abravenel *in* Iſa. 58. 13.

St. *Luke* is obſerved to call this Day of Expiation the *Faſt*: *When ſailing was now dangerous, becauſe the Faſt was already paſt*: That is, it was after the tenth of the ſeventh Month, a time of year when there was more danger of Sailing than in the earlier time of the year.

Τὴν Νηστείαν, Act. 27. 9.

Beſides

Beſides this great Faſt, there were others in uſe among the *Jews* in After-times; There were who faſted two days in a Week; There were *private* and *voluntary* Faſts which pious Perſons took upon themſelves; *Occaſional* ones appointed upon particular Emergencies. Beſides theſe, they had their *four times* a year; of which there is mention in this Prophet. The Faſt of the *fourth*, *fifth*, *ſeventh* and *tenth* Month. Luk. 18. Zech. 8. 19.

That of the *fourth* Month was upon occaſion that in that Month *Jeruſalem* was broken up by the *Chaldees*. This *Kimchi* calls the beginning of the Deſtruction of the Holy City. This was the true ground of this Faſt, what-ever the *Jews* add concerning the breaking of the Tables of Stone, ceaſing of the daily Sacrifice, and burning the Law, ſetting up an Idol in the Temple, *&c.* Jer. 39. 2. Jer. 52. 6, 7. Kimchi *in* Ezek. c. 1. v. 1. Abravenel *in* 2 Reg. c. 25.

That of the *fifth* Month was in memory of the burning of the Temple by the Men of *Babylon*, which happened in that Month. The *Jews* do indeed mention ſome other ſad things which happened to them in this Month: That then it was decreed that their Fore-fathers in the Wilderneſs ſhould not enter into *Canaan*: That the Temple was deſtroyed the ſecond time, that the City of *Bitter* was taken, *&c.* Jer. 52. 12, 13. Maimon. H. Taan. c. 5.

Jer. 41. 1, 2. That of the *ſeventh* Month was in memory of the Slaughter of *Gedaliah*, which happened in this Month.

That of the *tenth* Month was in memory of that Siege that was ſo fatal to them, whereof we have mention, (2 *King.* 25. 1. *Jer.* 52. 4. *chap.* 39. 1.) In this Month alſo came the ſad news to *Ezekiel*, that the City was ſmitten, *Ezek.* 33. 21.

By all this it appears, if we follow the Scripture-grounds of theſe Faſts; That they were kept in memory of the *Jews* Sufferings from the *Babylonians*, and upon occaſion of the Evils which happened to them about the time of that Captivity. They who were Captives in *Babylon*, are now returned to their City, and Building of their Temple: Their Captivity is expired; and now the queſtion is, Whether or not they ſhall need to Faſt any longer? *Should I weep in the fifth month, ſeparating my ſelf, as I have done ſo many years?* The queſtion will admit of ſome diſpute.

On the one ſide it might be ſaid: Why ſhould we Faſt, when the reaſon of our Faſting is ceaſed? We Faſted for the Burning of our City and Temple; we are now returned to that deſolate place, and 'tis in great meaſure raiſed from its Ruins:

Ruins: 'Tis now a time to rejoice, and not to mourn. 'Twas fit by the Rivers of *Babylon* to ſit down and weep when we remembred *Zion*. Well did it become us there to hang our Harps upon the Willows; That ſtrange Land was no place to ſing the Lord's Song. He that then called for Mourning, now calls for Joy: He hath turned back the Captivity of *Zion*, and now our Mouth is filled with laughter, and our Tongue with ſinging: The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

On the other hand they might plead for their Faſting thus: We ought not ſo ſoon to forget the Evils we have ſuffered, much leſs the Sins which brought them upon us. We are returned, but we are but newly returned. Our Temple is not finiſhed; or were it finiſhed, it holds no proportion to that which was deſtroyed: We are amidſt our Enemies, and not purged from our Sins. This Temple is like to want many things which the former had; and we come ſhort of what we ſhould be. We have ſtill much to do. Faſting is a great inſtrument of Piety; and the Houſe of Mourning will be more inſtructive, and more ſafe, than that of Feaſting.

The queſtion is, Whether or not they ſhall need Faſt any longer? They conſult the Prieſts and the

the Prophets, who might be preſumed moſt likely to inform them. The Prophet is inſtructed to give them an anſwer; and ſuch an one it is, as is very inſtructive to us; and he begins to do it in the Words of my Text, ſaying, *When ye faſted*, &c.

q. d. When ye Faſted and Mourned, was it to my advantage, or for my ſake, that ye did it? Ye Faſted indeed for Seventy years together; but as you took it upon your ſelves at firſt, ſo it was not upon its own account any pleaſure to me: For I am not pleaſed with bare Abſtinence, any more than with Eating: Your Obedience is acceptable, not your mere Faſting: This will turn your Faſts into Feaſts. *Thus* Zechar. 8. 19. *ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, The faſt of the fourth month, and the faſt of the fifth, and the faſt of the ſeventh, and the faſt of the tenth, ſhall be to the houſe of Judah joy and gladneſs.* But the way of turning theſe Faſts into Feaſts, may be learnt from what follows: *Therefore love the Truth and Peace.*

I ſhall, for my more orderly proceeding, ſhew,

Firſt, That mere Abſtinence, or Faſting, is not pleaſing to God.

Secondly,

Secondly, I ſhall ſhew the right uſe of Faſting.

Thirdly, I ſhall give ſome Rules for the better diſcharge of this Duty.

Fourthly, I ſhall apply it to our preſent caſe.

I. That mere Abſtinence or Faſting is not pleaſing to God. The *Jews* had Faſted without Fruit. God is not obliged by Faſting alone. Many have Faſted to Evil purpoſes, others to none. We have in this Kingdom kept many publick Faſts: Many times it had been as well, and ſometimes perhaps it had been better that we had eat and drank. Faſting is but an Inſtrument, and may be uſed well or ill. It does not of it ſelf commend us to God; It ſometimes renders us more deteſtable. Many have Faſted to themſelves, and not unto God. *Jezebel* proclaimed a Faſt, when ſhe deſigned her Neighbour's Vineyard; and ſome have Faſted that they might be ſeen of Men. A Man may Faſt out of Covetouſneſs; or Faſt for one Meal, that he may make the more room for the next. A Man may Faſt out of Superſtition, and lay a ſtreſs upon that, upon which God hath laid none. *Wherefore have we faſted,* (ſay they) *and thou ſeeſt not? Wherefore have we afflicted our ſoul, and thou* Iſa. 58. 3.

takeſt

takeſt no knowledge? God regarded not their Faſting, that was not ſufficient to commend them to Him: He does not envy us the uſe of his Creatures; not grudge us our Meat and Drink. We are vain if we think bare Faſting will procure his favour. *Did you at all faſt unto me? and when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for your ſelves, and drink for your ſelves?* (v. 6.) Though we ſeparate our ſelves from other Pleaſures, as the *Jews* did in their Faſts, (*v.* 3.) who were wont at ſuch times to abſtain from Bathing and Muſick, and other Pleaſures: Though we ſhould not onely abſtain, but chaſtiſe our Bodies; yet may all this be in vain, and to no purpoſe, and unacceptable to God. This appears from my Text, and from *Iſa.* 58.

For we may abſtain from Meat, and not from Sin: Drink no Wine, and be drunk with Paſſion, Pride, or Revenge: Forbear a Meal, and glut our ſelves with Malice, Luſt and Envy: Faſt one Meal, and be intemperate the next: Pinch our Bodies, and over-charge our Souls: 'Twas our Saviour's advice; *Take heed to your ſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be over-charged with ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and cares of this life.* Cares of this life will over-charge us as well as Meats and Drinks.

Luk. 21. 34.

This

This is not ſaid to diſcourage you from Faſting; what-ever it be alone, 'tis good in conjunction: 'Tis not Godlineſs, but 'tis a good Inſtrument and Companion of it. 'Tis often convenient, and ſometimes neceſſary. It ſerves the Purpoſes of Religion when 'tis uſed with care and prudence. I doubt not but 'tis a Duty, and very advantageous alſo. Nor is it hard to prove it ſo to be. It hath the approbation of God, and ſuffrages of Holy Men, and recommendation of the Holy Writ. 'Twas practiced by Ancient Chriſtians, joined with Prayer and Alms, of the earlieſt uſe in the Chriſtian Church, and of uſe among the devout before Chriſtianity. It hath a Reward annexed to it, and its Rules aſſigned, and its particular Energy (when joined with devout Prayer) allowed. 'Twas the *Phariſees* Boaſting, not Faſting, that was reproved. 'Tis ſometimes as needfull as Phyſick; and when well uſed, 'tis then always more ſafe. But then it muſt be taken as Phyſick with good advice and regiment. If it do any hurt, 'tis where 'tis not well managed.

II. I ſhall ſhew the right uſe of Faſting: To what purpoſe 'tis to be uſed, and what the great Intentions of it are: The want of heeding this

hath been very pernicious to Mankind: Hence it is that we have loſt our labour, in not having Faſted unto God. *Did ye faſt at all unto me*, &c?

1. It is very uſefull when it is uſed as an act of Revenge upon our ſelves for our Sins paſt: Then 'tis an act of Repentance, and a teſtimony of the hatred we bear to our Sins. This is reckoned among the Effects of a godly Sorrow:

2 Cor. 7. 11. *For behold, this ſelf-ſame thing that ye ſorrowed after a godly ſort, what carefulneſs it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of your ſelves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement deſire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge.* He that is a true Penitent, is a ſorrowfull Man; and as a teſtimony of that, he denies himſelf of what was otherwiſe lawfull, becauſe he had indulged himſelf in what was forbidden. It well becomes us to chaſtiſe our ſelves by Abſtinence for our paſt intemperance; For our Pride and Luſt by Severities and Humiliations.

2. 'Tis uſefull when 'tis uſed as an inſtrument of Mortification of our irregular Deſires and Appetites, when 'tis ἁμαρτίας ἀναιρετικον, *i. e.* deſtructive of our Sin. It hath a great tendency that way, as it with-draws ſuccors from our ſenſual deſires. Our Body is an unruly beaſt; if pam-

pampered, and too highly fed, it will endanger its rider. Plenty hurts us, and our Souls ſtarve under fulneſs of bread. *Thy children have forſaken me, and ſworn by them that are no Gods: When I had fed them to the full, they then committed Adultery, and aſſembled themſelves by troops in the harlot's houſes. Jeſurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatneſs: Then he forſook God which made him, and lightly eſteemed the Rock of his ſalvation: They provoked him to jealouſie with ſtrange Gods.* There are not many Men that can digeſt Plenty and Fulneſs. This is frequently the Parent of Luſt and Senſuality. And hence we eaſily lapſe into a brutiſh and ſenſual life. Here Faſting is a good inſtrument of Religion, as it with-draws the fewel of our Luſts, and the nouriſhment of our Vices. As in a Feaver, or great *Plethora*, a thin Diet is adviſable, ſo a conſtant Temperance and frequent Faſting are in the caſe before us. *Pinguis venter non gignit mentem tenuem.* Fulneſs is generally a wrong to our better part. S. *Hierom* tells of *Hilarion*, that when he found his Body encline him to folly, he ſtruck upon his Breaſt, and cried, That he would *take care that the Aſs ſhould kick no longer*; and to that purpoſe betook himſelf to frequent Faſtings and hard Labours.

Jer. 5. 7.

Deut 32. 15, 16.

Hieron. *ad nepot. de vita Cleric.*

Ego Aſelle faciam ut non calcitres.

Hieron. *in vit.* Hilarion.

1 Cor. 9. 27. *I keep under my body, and bring it unto ſubjection,* ſays St. *Paul.* We are in great danger from Fulneſs, a ſpare and thin Diet is generally the ſafer ſide; and Faſting is ſometimes needfull. Fulneſs Exod. 32. 6. is the Parent of our Vices. *The people ſat down to eat and drink, and roſe up to play.* Our firſt Parents rendred themſelves and us miſerable by Tertull. *de jejun.* eating. *Salutem gula vendidit.* Sin and Death came this way into the World. St. *Baſil* obſerves, that whereas *Moſes* Faſted at the giving of the Law, and ſo Faſting uſher'd it in; yet the Tables that were written by the Finger of God, and received by Faſting, were broken by Drunkenneſs. They ſat down to eat and drink, and roſe up to play.

I ſhall not need to tell you the miſchiefs of feaſting and pampering our Bodies: It greatly endangers our Souls. When the Children of *Job* feaſted from houſe to houſe, the good Man (knowing how prone Men were in that caſe to Job 1. 5. exceed) *ſent and ſanctified them, and roſe up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all: For Job ſaid, It may be that my ſons have ſinned, and curſed God in their hearts.* 'Tis often ſo, that great Feaſting is attended with follies and miſchiefs; nor were it hard to produce many Examples to this purpoſe:

Solomon

Solomon preferrs the Houſe of Mourning before that of Feaſting. Eccl. 7. 2, 3, 4.

3. Faſting is a good help to Prayer. Prayer and Faſting have a mighty force. The moſt obſtinate Evil Spirit, that gives way to no other methods, is yet caſt out by Prayer and Faſting. The one of theſe takes us off from the Creature, the other brings us nearer unto God. We pray but faintly when we are fed to the full. We ſeldom ſerve God well upon plentifull Entertainments. Our Minds are moſt at liberty, when our Bodies are empty. No wonder they are joined together in Holy Scripture. Faſting helps to wing our Devotions; We are then fitteſt to worſhip God with Devotion when we are Faſting. *Aaron* and his Sons were forbidden Wine and ſtrong drink when they went into the Tabernacle. Levit. 10. 9. The publick Service of the Morning, under the Temple, was wont to be performed Faſting. They were not wont to drink till that was over: That did not begin till the third hour of the day. St. *Peter* argued ſtrongly enough to thoſe who knew this practice. *Theſe are not drunken, as ye ſuppoſe, ſeeing it is but the third hour of the day.* Act. 11. 15.

Thus have I given a ſhort, but a true account of the uſefulneſs of Faſting: Theſe are the true

Uſes

Uſes of Faſting, both publick and private: If it miniſter to none of theſe Ends, 'twill be to no purpoſe, and we might as well have eaten and drank. If it advance us not in Piety and real Goodneſs; if it ſerve not to chaſtiſe a Sin committed, nor to prevent one for the future; if it do not help us in our Prayers, and bring us nearer to God, and wean us from the Creature, it can ſerve no wiſe purpoſe. We have need enough to Faſt, if we duly conſider what we are, and what we have been. God hath called us to Mourning very often, and very loudly. He hath viſited us with the Sword, and Fire, and Peſtilence. *I have over-thrown ſome of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrha, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning.* ---- I wiſh I could not with the Prophet go farther, and add what follows; *Yet have ye not returned unto me, ſaith the Lord.* 'Tis true, we have kept ſome Faſting-days (and we now begin to be weary of that too,) but what elſe have we done?

Amos 4. 10.

Are we any better than we were before? Do we love God more fervently, and more heartily love one another? Our City hath been burnt indeed, but not our Vices. They are intire, and not conſumed. We have faſted, but have we amended alſo? Are our Sins weakened, and our Devoti-

Devotions enflamed? Is God better ſerved among us? Is there more Humility, Charity and Brotherly-kindneſs to be found amongſt us? *Should ye not hear the words which the Lord hath cried by the former Prophets, when Jeruſalem was inhabited and in proſperity*, &c. ſays this Prophet, *v.* 7. What that was which the former Prophets required, you may learn from *v.* 9. *Execute true judgment, and ſhew mercy and compaſſions every man to his brother: And oppreſs not the widow and the fatherleſs, the ſtranger nor the poor, and let none of you imagin evil againſt his brother in your heart.* We have Faſted often, but where is our Repentance? We have often confeſſed our Sins, but who hath forſaken them? It was the Cuſtom among the *Jews*, upon the day of their publick Faſting, to procure an ancient and wiſe Man to recite the words of Humiliation: Among other things, he was wont to depreciate mere Abſtinence, or the outward ſhew of Humiliation. He told them that it was ſaid of the *Ninevites*, not that God ſaw their Sackcloth and Faſting, but that *He ſaw their Work.* So it is God is pleaſed with our Repentance, not our bare Abſtinence. Faſting is, *Adjumentum non perfectio pietatis*: 'Tis a good help to Godlineſs, not Godlineſs it ſelf. Maimon. H. Taan.

III. I ſhall

III. I ſhall proceed to give ſome Rules for the better diſcharge of this Duty.

1. Let us take care that we do it with great humility of mind, and that we do by no means give way to a proud thought. Do not vaunt thy ſelf, or contemn and deſpiſe thy Brother, as the Proud *Phariſee* did. Thou haſt need of Faſting, or no need. If no need, why doeſt thou boaſt of doing that which God requires not, and which ſerves no wiſe purpoſe? If thou needeſt it, that Conſideration ought to humble thee: No Man is proud of taking Phyſick, and Faſting amounts to no more. 'Tis Medicinal, and deſign'd to cure us of ſome Diſeaſe. We are commonly troubled that we need a Medicine, no Man is proud that he makes uſe of one. *Sanctifie a Faſt, call a ſolemn Aſſembly.* Such an Aſſembly is deſigned for a publick Cure, and ſpeaks an Epidemical diſeaſe. Here's no colour for Pride and Oſtentation. We may as well be proud of Plaiſters upon our Sores, as of Faſting. And yet this Vanity we are liable to. Our Lord gives us Caution: *When thou faſteſt, anoint thy head, and waſh thy face, that thou appear not unto men to faſt.* Bare Abſtinence commends us not to

Luk. 17.

Joel 11. 15. Ἁγιάζατε νηστείαν, κηρύξατε διαπτείαν, LXXII.

Matt. 6. 17, 18.

to God; and therefore we have no cauſe on that account to boaſt. 'Twill be no comfort to us to undergo the *labour*, and loſe the *reward* of Faſting. Let us not, when we Faſt, deſpiſe him that Eats. Let us not value our ſelves by it. Our Pride will do us more harm, than our Abſtinence will do us good. Our great End of Faſting is to kill our Luſts; and if we let our Pride grow, we loſe our great End.

2. Let it be with Charity, and Expreſſions of kindneſs to our Brother. There's a Saying among the *Jews*, that *the beſt of a Faſt is Alms.* Iſa. 58. 6, 7. In this we are ſure we do well. And it becomes us, when we implore God's Mercy, to ſhew Mercy to one another. *Is not this the Faſt that I have choſen? To loſe the bands of wickedneſs, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are caſt out to thy houſe? When thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy ſelf from thine own fleſh?* It is good advice, that *what we deny our ſelves, we ſhould give to the poor.* What we ſpare, let us beſtow upon him that needs. Let us abſtain, that we may ſave ſomething to give. The Meal that we ſpare, *Quod ventri ſubtrahitur pauperi detur.*

let us give to the Poor. When we Faſt, let us lay by ſomething to feed others with. We read, that when *Tarentum* was beſieged by the *Romans*, that the Neighbours of *Rhegium* Faſted every tenth day, and ſent to the beſieged what they ſhould otherwiſe have eaten themſelves. A rare Example in the Heathens, and that which ſerves for a juſt reproach to many titular Chriſtians. Let us deny our ſelves, that we may help others. Our Temperance would afford a great proviſion for the hungry, and our Faſting much more. Faſting will not avail without Charity. Faſting, without Alms, is like a Lamp without Oyl. When we afflict our ſelves, let us be ſure to be mercifull to our Brother.

3. Let it be attended with fervent Prayers to God. 'Twill not ſerve our turn that we abſtain from the Creature, unleſs we turn to our Creator. Theſe muſt be joined; for that is one great End of Faſting, to diſpoſe us for our Prayers. Our Saviour puts them cloſe together in his Sermon on the Mount; They are joined together in the Character of the devout Widow, and in conjunction are of mighty force.

Matt. 6.
Luk. 11. 37.
Matt. 17. 21.

4. Our Faſting muſt be attended with a conſtant Sobriety and Temperance. He that Faſts one

one day, and is intemperate the next; He whoſe Faſt is a Prologue or Epilogue to an Exceſs, Faſts to no good purpoſe at all. A conſtant Temperance is indiſpenſably neceſſary; here all Men are obliged, and at all times. This cannot be ſaid of Faſting. Beſides, we ſhould learn Temperance at leaſt by Faſting. Learn to deny our Appetites, when they exceed the bounds of Reaſon and Religion. 'Tis a good uſe of Faſting to inure our ſelves by it to a ſtrict Temperance. 'Tis a fooliſh and brutiſh thing to make way for a Faſt by a luxurious Carnival, and to cloſe it with an exceſſive Feaſt.

5. Our Faſting muſt ever be accompanied with an holy Life. God is no more pleaſed with the Faſting, than with the Prayers of a wicked Man. We muſt not onely abſtain from Meat and Drink, but from Pride and Peeviſhneſs, Wrath and Bitterneſs, Covetouſneſs and Oppreſſion; a conceit of Our ſelves, and a contempt of our Brother.

6. We muſt take care that we do not exceed in Faſting, to the deſtruction of our Health. There's no great danger that many will do this: Yet ſome there are, and many there have been, to whom this advice is ſeaſonable. We read

of many among the Ancients that went very far; That faſted to Paleneſs and Feebleneſs, abſtained from all Fleſh, and all Wine; That faſted to great lengths, and under great weakneſs of Body; Of ſome that lived upon the Roots of Trees, and of one whom the Sun never ſaw eating. I fear we are run into the other extreme, and inſtead of over-faſting our ſelves, we indulge our ſelves too much. But thoſe who are prone to too great an Abſtinence, ſhould remember that God will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice. The Yoke of Chriſt is eaſie, and his Burden light. There's a Fable in *Plutarch* of an Ox and a Camel, that were the Fellow-ſervants to one Maſter. The Ox bore the burden alone, the Camel would bear no part of it: But the Ox told him the time was coming that (when he was dead) he muſt bear him and all the burden too. 'Tis ſo with the Body and the Mind; if the Body be over-laid, the Mind is forced *to ſink and ſuffer with it.* We muſt have a care we render not our ſelves unfit for the Service of God; and that we ſhall be in great meaſure, when our Bodies are indiſpoſed.

Sulpit. Sever. *Dialog.*

Plutarch *de Sanit. Tuend.*

Συννοσεῖν ἐκείνῳ καὶ συνκάμνειν.

7. I onely add, That if we Faſt for Mortification of a Luſt and ill Habit, we muſt repeat it

it frequently, till we have gained the Conqueſt. 'Tis not once taking Phyſick will remove a Chronical diſtemper and ill habit of body; we muſt enter into a courſe and method. The like may be ſaid of Faſting, under ſome great Judgment of Famine, Sword or Peſtilence: It will become us to continue it as long as the Judgment remains. Maimon. Taan. *c.* 4. *f.* 18.

Thus I have given you ſome Rules of Faſting: God grant that we may obſerve them, and then we ſhall find our Faſting good Phyſick; which, who-ever takes, muſt obſerve Rules.

IV. I proceed now to make ſome Application and Inference. And,

1. We may hence learn why, after all our Faſting in this Kingdom, we are no better. We are ready to ſay, *Wherefore have we faſted, and thou ſeeſt not? Wherefore have we afflicted our ſoul, and thou takeſt no knowledge?* I may well reply in the words of my Text; *Did ye at all faſt unto me, even unto me?* We have abſtained from Meat, and been ſwoln with Pride. We have eaten no Fleſh for ſome Seaſons, but in the mean have devoured one another. We have called for Iſa. 58. 3.

Mercy

Mercy from God, but have not ſhewed it to our Brother. Our Faſting and Prayers have not availed, becauſe we have retained our Vices. We ought to conſider, that Faſting and Prayer, and hearing Sermons, &c. are but the *Means*, not the *End* of Religion. The End of it is to make us good and happy, like God here, and bleſſed with him hereafter. We have reſted in the Means, and not attained the End. We have meaſured our Proficiency by our much uſe of the Means, not conſidering that it is the Attainment of the End that concerns us moſt. The main queſtion is not, how often we Faſt, or how many Sermons we have heard; but whether we be humble and modeſt, patient in affliction, content with our condition, reſigned to God's Will, inflamed with Love to him and to our Brother. Do we live a life of Faith, and are our Hearts in Heaven? We Faſt, ſo did the *Jews* Seventy years, and ſo did the *Phariſees* twice a Week. We pray, and ſo did the *Jewiſh* Hypocrites alſo; But are we humble and mercifull, harmleſs and holy? Are we weaned from the World, and devoted to God and to Religion? Where ſhall we find any of this Reformation? Who can diſcern that we are either more

more pious toward God, or merciſull to our Brother, more temperate and ſober, chaſt and modeſt?

2. We may learn from the great Ends of Faſting what need we have of it. We have cauſe to mourn and afflict our ſelves if ever any people had, whether we reflect upon our paſt Sins, or our preſent Profaneneſs, and the manifeſt decay of Piety and Godlineſs among us. We are riſen up in our Father's room a generation of Evil-doers. *Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit nos nequiores.* Our Profaneneſs and Wickedneſs hath been common and daring, Religion been derided and mocked at, the Holy Scriptures become the ſubject of Droll, and the contempt of them that ſet up for Wits. We have bid defiance to what is Sacred and Holy. We had need mourn for the Abominations that have been committed among us.

3. Let us then humble our ſelves before God; and put away every Evil thing; Reform our Lives and our Tempers, and not flatter our ſelves; Nothing leſs than this will ſecure the Bleſſings which we have, or prevent the return of thoſe Evils which we have felt, and had juſt cauſe to fear. And the more effectually to perſwade

ſwade you to this, let me deſire you to conſider,

1. The crying and hainous Sins of the Nation. They cry for Vengeance, which we cannot think to prevent, unleſs we Repent and Reform. We cannot but lament the wofull decay of Piety and Vertue. We have been Contemners of God, and of his Holy Worſhip, both publick and private. We have made light of the *Sacraments*, and derided the *Myſteries* of Religion. We have profaned the *Holy Name* of God, and broke in upon the *Time* which was incloſed and ſet a-part for his Holy Worſhip. The *Oracles* of God have not eſcaped our profane attempts; and we have ſet our Mouths againſt the Heavens; and have been ſo far from the *Power*, that we have hardly retained the *Form* of Godlineſs.

We are entertained in our Streets with Horrid *Oaths* and *Execrations*, with the ſight of the Intemperate reeling to and fro; And in other places of Converſation, nothing is more common than playing with the *Sacred* Writ, expoſing the Holy Oracles of God to contempt, and Reviling the Miniſters of Religion, and the burning and ſhining Lights of the World.

Mercy

Mercy and Truth are far from us, and we bite and devour each other. Our Magiſtrates have often born the Sword in vain; and our Preachers of Righteouſneſs have not always been the Examples of it. We have relaxed our ſtricter Diſcipline, loſt our Religious Fervor, and quitted that ſimplicity of Manners, and generoſity and freedom of our Temper which our Engliſh Anceſtors were famous for.

Where ſhall we find any Numbers of Men who worſhip God in their Families? That take due care to inſtruct their Children and Servants in the Principles of Religion and Vertue? That govern themſelves, and thoſe under their influence, with exact regard thereunto? How great a Number are there that live without God in the World? who, like the Judge in the Parable, neither fear God, nor regard Men? who run counter to all that is Holy and Good? whoſe Mouths are full of Curſing, and their Right hands are inſtruments of Falſehood? We ſhall ſoon find ſufficient cauſe of a deep Humiliation, when we conſider the Sins of *others*, and eſpecially our *own*: We have cauſe enough to *faſt* and to *mourn*, that we may divert the Judgments that our Iniquities call for. And God grant our *Humiliation* and Godly Sorrow may bear ſome proportion to the

hainouſneſs of our Crimes. It appears, from what hath been ſaid, to be our *Duty* to Faſt and Mourn.

2. Conſider alſo what it is that lies at ſtake, and depends on the King's Succeſs by Sea and Land: If we do this, it will appear not onely to be our *Duty*, but our *Intereſt* alſo, which generally takes the ſureſt and faſteſt hold on Mankind. It is very fit we ſhou'd Faſt at ſuch a time as this. It becomes us to do it when the King expoſeth himſelf to the greateſt dangers. The words of *Uriah* are applicable on this occaſion: *The Ark* (ſays he) *and Iſrael, and Judah abide in Tents, and my Lord Joab, and the ſervants of my Lord are encamped in the open fields; ſhall I then go into mine houſe to eat, and to drink,* &c? 2 *Sam.* 11. 11. We are nearly intereſted in our Succeſs abroad. And what is it that lies at ſtake? 'Tis, in ſhort, the indiſturbed Profeſſion and Exerciſe of our Religion, our Property, our Lives, our Laws and Liberty; in a word, our *All*: All that *is* dear to us, and all that *ought* ſo to be. The Conteſt is now, whether we ſhall be *Free-men* or *Vaſſals*; be governed by *Laws* or *Dragoons*: The ſtruggle is between *Truth* and *Falſehood*; *Religion* that is *pure* and *undefiled*, and *Superſtition* and *Idolatry*.

God hath wrought a great Deliverance for us: He hath done it without our *help*, and without our

our *fault*: He hath done it not onely without our *deſert*, but notwithſtanding our *demerits*: We are ſaved whether we would or no: We were reſcued from our Enemies as a brand plucked out of the fire: We are remarkable Monuments of the Mercy of God. Let's ſin no more, leſt a worſe thing come upon us; leſt we be returned back to our former dangers; If we be, we ſhall find our laſt End worſe than our Beginning. And whereas we were once *chaſtiſed* with *Whips*, we muſt expect then to be *ſtung* with *Scorpions*.

3. Our Repentance and Amendment is our onely ſecurity. This is the way to procure the favour and bleſſing of Heaven: Our Fleets and Armies are poor things, if God be not with us: Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made Heaven and Earth: If our Ways pleaſe Him, he will ſoon ſubdue our Enemies, or cauſe them to beat Peace with us: No Weapon form'd againſt us ſhall proſper, if God be for us: And if he be our Enemy, we ſhall not have any cauſe to rely upon the help of our ſtrongeſt Allies, or the greateſt of our Preparations. If we do not Repent, nothing will do us good; our very Succeſs will be but a Snare to us, and our Victory will not prevent our Ruin. Wou'd to God we were duly ſenſible of this.

To Conclude.

As we wish well to our King and Country, as we value our Religion and our Liberty, let us return to our Duty, and break off our Sins by Repentance. Let us reform what is amiss in our selves, and restrain those who are under our Charge and Influence. As ever we would have God do any thing for us, let us do what we can for the glory of his Name: Let us use all our power for the advancing his Truth, the encouraging his Service, and suppressing all that Profaneness, and daring Impiety, that hath hitherto obstructed the Success of our Forces by Sea and Land.

This is what all pious Souls long to see, and hope for this Good from the Example and united Endeavours of this great Assembly: May then all inferior Magistrates use their Power for the suppressing of Vice; and may we of the Clergy preach it, and live it down: May all Masters of Families serve God with their Domesticks; All Governors of Youth bring them up in the nurture of the Lord; and may every Man of us contribute to the Common safety, by turning from his Iniquity: *Which God of his Mercy grant*, &c.

FINIS.